

A Study of Apology Strategies Used by Iraqi EFL University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at exploring apology strategies of English used by Iraqi EFL students, apology strategies in Iraqi Arabic and the pragmatic strategies of Iraqi EFL students in relation to the use of apology as a speech act. The data analyzed in this study were collected in Al-Yarmouk University College and University of Diyala. The study was mixed method in nature using a questionnaire and an interview adapted from previous studies. The quantitative data was obtained from fifty-five Iraqi EFL students using Discourse Completion Task Questionnaires (DCTQ) while the qualitative data obtained from individual interviews carried out with twelve Iraqi EFL students. The results were showed different kinds of apology strategies used by Iraqi EFL students. A new classification of apology strategies was provided in this study. Results of the study showed that Iraqi EFL students used a variation of apology strategies, they were well aware of how to use adequate apology forms to meet the requirements of specific situations and relationships, and they felt the need for explaining and avoiding interpretation of their response as an apology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1970's, the term pragmatics developed as a subfield of linguistics. It concerns the speaker's intended meaning and the listener's interpretation of that meaning [1]. Pragmatics is the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context [2]. Pragmatics consists of two main components, the pragmalinguistics and the sociopragmatics. Pragmalinguistics is concerned with the appropriateness of form, and the sociopragmatics is concerned with the appropriateness of meaning in social context [3].

Pragmatic competence refers to the language knowledge of the speaker and the use of appropriateness and politeness rules, by which the speaker formulates and understands speech acts. Speech acts such as apologies, complaints, compliments, refusals, requests, and suggestions are considered as one of key interest areas for linguistic pragmatics. Learning pragmatic rules of other languages enable learners to produce language that is socially and culturally appropriate since the languages are not same. Many pragmatic studies of apology [4]-[11] were conducted in many languages and compared these language systems with that of in English.

2. OBJECTIVES

English is a foreign language (EFL) for Iraqis and it is taught in schools as a compulsory subject.

Generally, Iraqis are required to study English as a foreign language for approximately sixteen years from first in primary school to higher education. The education system in Iraq focuses more on teaching English grammar and reading. As a result, in real-life situations, Iraqi students may often fail to communicate effectively with foreigners when communicating in English. Understanding the meaning behind the words is very important to avoid the misunderstanding between the speaker and the hearer and to achieve the communicative goal, especially when the speaker and the hearer are from different cultures. In such a situation, the polite mode is preferred to avoid communication breakdowns or offense. And since the concept of politeness varies across cultures, there appears to be a need for studying apology strategies and speech acts in specific cultures. Such a study may highlight some differences between Iraqis and foreigners and their view of politeness during apologizing.

This study aims to provide contrast evidence on apology speech acts in Iraqi Arabic and in English showing the differences and the similarities between these two languages regarding apologies. The results of this study aims to provide Iraqi EFL learners with information that may help them improve their pragmatic competence in English. The study also contributes to pragmatics-teaching curriculum and EFL research.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the field of sociolinguistics, more attention was given to apologies than to other speech acts [12]. Crystal (1985: 240) defines pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication.” [13]. According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) apologies are post-event acts which refer to an event, has already taken place or that will take place [14]. Since there appears to be a variation of definitions of apology, researchers provided different types of apology strategies. Olshtain and Cohen (1983) classified apology strategies into five main categories, namely: explanation, expression of apology, promise of non-recurrence, acknowledgement of responsibility, and offer of repair [15]. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) classified apology strategies into five categories, namely: offer of repair, illocutionary force indicating devices, taking on responsibility, promise of forbearance, and explanation or account [16]. According to Fraser (1981) apologies are classified into nine strategies, namely: requesting the acceptance of the given apology, announcing that apology is forthcoming through clauses, stating the offender’s obligation to apology with words like “I must apologize”, offering to apologize, expressing regret for the offense through the use of intensifiers, acknowledging responsibility for the act, requesting forgiveness for the offense, promising forbearance from a similar offending act, and offering redress to show that the offender really regrets the offense with offers [17]. Holmes (1990) classified apology strategies into four super strategies with eight subcategories [18].

“A. Explicit expression of apology, 1. an offer of apology, 2. an expression of regret, 3. a request for forgiveness; B. Explanation or account, on the; C. Acknowledgement of responsibility, 1. accepting the blame, 2. expressing self-deficiency, 3. recognizing V as deserving apology, 4. expressing lack of intent, 5. offering repair/ redress; D. Promise of forbearance.”

Many researchers conducted various studies to compare speech acts from native and non-native language perspectives, some of these studies can be summarized as follows:

1. Trosborg (1987) found that there was no negative first language pragmalinguistic transfer from Danish learners of English [19].
2. House (1988) showed that German learners of English transferred their own communicative styles from German into English by using apology expressions [20].
3. Garcia (1989) revealed that Venezuelans used more positive politeness strategies, whereas the native speakers applied more negative styles [21].
4. Olshtain’s (1989) found that the speakers of French, Hebrew, English, and German used the same apology strategies (illocutionary force indicating device) [4].
5. Frescura (1993) revealed that the native speakers of Italian used self-supportive formulas, while native speakers of English used hearer-supportive formulas [22].
6. Sugimoto (1997) found that Japanese students stressed the importance of atonement (description of damage, statement of remorse, accounts, and reparation) more than Americans, and except for accounts strategies [23].
7. Hussein and Hammouri (1998) revealed that Jordanians use more strategies to apologize than Americans [24].

In general, these studies showed that apology strategies varied among languages and they were influenced by orientation and culture.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Fifty- five English major students (fourth year) were chosen randomly from two colleges in Iraq: Al- Yarmouk University College and College of Education for Human Sciences/ University of Diyala. To collect ample information and to get reliable data, the study analyzed one questionnaire (Discourse Completion Task Questionnaire (DCTQ)) and one interview with twelve participants. Before conducting the actual study, the DCTQ and the interview were piloted and validated.

Discourse completion task questionnaire is considered an effective research instrument [25]. In the present study, the DCTQ consisted of two parts; the first one contained background information about gender, status, and the second part contained fourteen situations adapted from apology speech studies [15], [26],[27].

The interview is considered an effective instrument to get invisible data that cannot be observed directly, such as feelings, beliefs, behavior, intentions, and thoughts [28]. In this study, the interview consisted of two parts: the first one asked about the participants' background information, and the second part was asking about significance of apology and asking about apology strategies.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSES OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

There were fifty-five participants, but five were left out as not of the analysis because they did not answer all questions in the DCTQ. Thus the total numbers of questionnaire respondents was fifty Iraqi EFL undergraduate students. Apology strategies were obtained by using the questionnaire in this study and data was analyzed using the SPSS based on the strategies provided by Holmes (1990) [18]. These strategies can be shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Holmes's (1990) Apology Strategies Classification

1. An Explicit expression of apology
a) An offer of apology/ IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device)
b) An expression of regret
c) A request for forgiveness
2. An explanation or account.
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility
a) Accepting the blame
b) Express self-deficiency
c) Recognize H (hearer) as entitled to an apology
d) Express lack of intent
e) Offer repair/ redress
4. A promise of forbearance.

Adapted from Holmes's (1990)

Table 2 shows the results elicited from the DCTQ. These results are related to the first objective of this study, that is, to explore the apology strategies in English used by Iraqi EFL students.

Table 2. Apology strategies in English used by Iraqi EFL students

Apology Strategies	Number	Percentage (%)
1. An Explicit expression of apology		
a) An offer of apology/ IFID	13	1.4
b) An expression of regret	590	61.5
c) A request for forgiveness	23	2.4
2. An explanation or account	77	8.1
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility		
a) Accepting the blame	33	3.4
b) Express self-deficiency	61	6.4
c) Recognize H as entitled to an apology	1	0.1
d) Express lack of intent	79	8.2
e) Offer repair/ redress	73	7.6
4. A promise of forbearance	9	0.9
Total	960	100

Table 2 shows that out of nine hundreds and sixty out of nine hundreds and sixty-five were valid, and five of them missed the values, as the respondents did not provide an apology for some situations. Iraqi EFL students used explicit expressions of apology, especially expressions of regret (61.5), used more frequently than other strategies. Expressing lack of intent was the second highest rank in the frequency of

apology strategies (8.2) followed by explanation or account (8.1), offer repair/ redress (7.6), express self-deficiency (6.4), accepting the blame (3.4), a request for forgiveness (2.4), an offer of apology (1.4), a promise of forbearance (0.9), and finally, the lowest strategy used recognize H (hearer) as entitled to an apology (0.1).

Table 3 shows the results elicited from the DCTQ. These results are related to the second objective of this study, that is, to explore the apology strategies of Iraqi Arabic used by Iraq EFL students. As it is noticed from the questionnaire results, many Iraqi students used "Pardon" instead of "Sorry" since Iraqis use the Arabic word: العفو (Al-Afau) which means sorry.

This means that many Iraqi students translate from their mother tongue into the target language.

Example 1. Student number 19: Pardon I didn't mean that.

Some Iraqi EFL students blamed the hearer instead of apologizing or regretting.

Example 2. Item 4. You copied an essay from a website for your assignment and your instructor found out. *What would you say to your instructor?*

Student number 43: Because you didn't help me

Table 3. Apology strategies in Iraqi Arabic

Apology Strategies	Number	Percentage (%)
1. An Explicit expression of apology		
d) An offer of apology/ IFID	189	20.7
e) An expression of regret	375	41.1
f) A request for forgiveness	11	1.2
2. An explanation or account	117	12.8
3. An acknowledgement of responsibility		
f) Accepting the blame	27	2.9
g) Express self-deficiency	32	3.5
h) Recognize H as entitled to an apology	0	0
i) Express lack of intent	103	11.3
j) Offer repair/ redress	53	5.8
4. A promise of forbearance	6	0.7
Total	913	100

Table 3 shows that nine hundred and thirteen out of nine hundred and eighty-three apologies given to the fourteen situations by the fifty respondents were valid, and seventy of them missed the values, as the respondents did not provide an apology for some situations. Iraqi EFL students used an explicit expression of apology, especially an expression of regret more frequently (41.1) than the other strategies. An offer of apology strategy is the second highest rank in the frequency of apology strategies (20.7). Then explanation or account (12.8), express lack of intent (11.3), offer repair/ redress (5.8), express self-deficiency (3.5), accepting the blame (2.9), a request for forgiveness (1.2), and finally, the lowest strategy used was that promise of forbearance (0.7). Most Iraqi students used expressions of regret and offers of apology more frequently and it is noticed from the questionnaire results that most Iraqi students used these two strategies together, as shown in the examples that follow:

Example 1. Student number 8: اني كلش اسف واعتذر
atithir'kulish asif wa a Ani.

Translation: I am very sorry and apologize

Some Iraqi students used explanation and justification at the same time when they apologize. Most of them used swearing in situations that they express lack of intent. Sometimes they avoided responsibility for certain situations.

Example 1. Student number 27: والله لم اقصد، اعذرنى

Wallah LemAqsid, A'athrny

Translation: Swear I did not mean, excuse me.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSES OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data was transcribed from interview sessions undertaken with twelve Iraqi EFL students and relates to the third objective of this study, namely, to explore apology strategies of Iraqi EFL students. The analysis of the interviews aimed to find out in depth information about the apology strategies used by Iraqi EFL students in different sociolinguistics situations. The interviews also provided information on students' opinions about the significance of apologies. Results of this analysis can be described as follows:

1. Significance of apologies

a) Iraqi Arabic apologies and English apologies are social speech acts. All participants agreed that Iraqi

Arabic apologies and English apologies are social speech acts.

- b) Again, all participants agreed on the importance of apologies as speech acts. Some of them considered it as something moral that must be done.

2. Apology strategies

- a) Translate apologies from Iraqi Arabic to English when performing apology acts in English

Eight out of twelve participants mentioned that they do not translate apology from their mother tongue to the target language when they perform apology act in English. Four participants mentioned that they translate from their mother tongue to the target language when they perform apology acts in English. They gave reasons that they have to transfer their ideas using their language then making a translation into the target language. This variation in their respondents may be due to their level of language proficiency or lack of linguistic resources in English.

- b) Using variation of apology patterns to match hearers' social status that are higher, equal, or lower in status

All participants agreed that they use variations of apology patterns depending on the social status and whether it is higher, equal, or lower in status.

- c) Using variation of apology patterns to match hearers' social distance that is close, neutral, or far social distance.

All participants agreed that they use variation of apology patterns depending on the social status and whether it is close, neutral, or far social distance.

- d) Using different apology patterns according to the situation that is harsh or not.

All participants agreed that they used different apology patterns according to the kind of situation.

7. DISCUSSION

Regarding social constraints such as social distance, social status, and severity of offense, Iraqi EFL students were well aware of how to use adequate apology forms to meet the requirements of specific situations and relationships. The most frequently used strategy was that of explicit expressions of apology, especially expressions of regret. These results corroborate those of Holmes (1990) [18], Intachakra (2001) [29], and Marquez (2000) [30].

Regarding the results of apology strategies of Iraqi Arabic, it can be noticed that Iraqi EFL students also used explicit expressions of apology, especially expressions of regret more frequently. In Iraqi Arabic, they also used an offer of apology, an explanation or account, and they expressed lack of intent more frequently than other strategies. Recognizing H (hearer) as entitled to an apology is never used in Iraqi Arabic. With the explanation strategy, they used justifications in many situations. They also used intensifiers of apology such as very, really, and so. In Iraqi Arabic swearing with lack of intent strategy was used more frequently.

Based on the results borne out in this study, a classification of apology strategies is provided in Table 6 and since there appears to be no information on such a classification, this classification may be used as a yardstick for further studies on apology as speech acts in Iraq or in any other country.

Table 4. Raed and Jafre's (2015) Apology Strategies Classification

Apology Strategies	
1. A Direct expression of apology	
a)	An expression of regret and/ or an offer of apology
b)	An act of forgiveness
2. An explanation and justification.	
3. Taking responsibility	
a)	Accepting the blame
b)	Express lack of intent with/ without swearing
c)	Offer repair/ redress
4. Avoiding responsibility	
5. Intensifiers of apology	
6. Giving of further time	

8. IMPLICATION

It is hoped that the findings of this study can raise Iraqi EFL students' awareness and understanding of cultural differences between Iraqi culture and that of English language, since the difference in sociolinguistics is related to culture. The results of this study can contribute to pragmatics-teaching curriculum that they could use the information and the results provided by this study as a base to improve the

syllabuses. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of this study might also contribute to the researches in TESOL.

9. CONCLUSION

The results of this study revealed that Iraqi EFL students used a variation of apology strategies depending on the fourteen situations in the DCTQ. They were well aware of how to use adequate apology forms to meet the requirements of specific situations and relationships, and they felt the need for explaining and avoiding interpretation of their response as an apology.

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